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EDITORIAL NOTES.

Plague, or pest, has existed in California since March, 1900, and possibly for a somewhat longer period. In 1894 it appeared epidemically in Hong Kong, probably coming from the interior of China, and four years later an epidemic broke out in Bombay. It could not have reached San Francisco earlier than 1894 or 1895 and probably did not come until 1898 or 1899. The first recognized and verified case was found March 6th, 1900. We all know the history of events following its discovery; it is the same history of denial, abuse, antagonism, which has been written wherever an epidemic of plague has occurred. But the fight, in San Francisco, while long and bitter, was slowly but surely won, and no case was noted in the city from February, 1904, till May, 1907. During this period, however, cases had been noted in Contra Costa County and in Alameda County, and the circumstances under which they occurred seemed clearly to point to the ground squirrels as the agents carrying the disease. It has been impossible, however, up to the present time, to obtain a squirrel or the body of one sufficiently fresh to determine its condition. All the evidence bears us out, however, in assuming that the infected rats—or fleas—of San Francisco, carried the infection to the ground squirrels of Contra Costa and Alameda Counties, in the early years of the century, and that the disease has remained in

those sections, slowly spreading, up to the present time. Doubtless the present epidemic in San Francisco had its origin in infected rats or fleas coming from one of these counties. So far as San Francisco is concerned, the presence of plague need excite no uneasiness; but with regard to the bay counties, however, the matter is quite different. The gravest danger lies in our ignorance, for we do not know where the infection is, how far it has traveled nor in what directions. In dispute of these assertions it is argued that very few cases have been noted in the counties mentioned and that if the disease really did exist and had existed in this territory, there would have been more cases. But that argument is without weight for we could not expect to find many cases of the disease in sections where the people live an out-of-doors life, are not crowded together and have plenty of air and sunshine. Moreover, they ordinarily do not come in close contact with squirrels nor invade the territory of the squirrel; and when the squirrel gets sick, he goes into his hole to die.

Clearly, the gravity of the situation is not to be underestimated nor brushed lightly aside with a mere negation or a boastful clamor about our "wonderful climate;" plague pays scant attention to climate, for the rat—and consequently his favorite disease, plague—thrives equally well in all climates. Nor is this a matter that concerns only California; the whole United States is interested, for the rat is a great traveler and where he goes he takes his fleas and his plague. We have got to find out just how far the infection has gone and then begin to get rid of it, and there is just one way of doing that—a careful inspection of all dead by someone who knows plague when he sees it. No matter how competent the man, no matter how excellent a physician, if he has not had experience with plague he is worthless for this work. It is universal experience that at least forty per cent of cases are not diagnosed as plague by the attending physician, even in times of marked epidemic, and the probabilities are that in our own experience in this state, the percentage of unrecognized cases would come nearer a hundred. One physician who has had four cases in his practice, and was on the lookout for the disease all the time, has reported that he did not make the diagnosis, unaided, in a single one of these cases; and this was not in San Francisco, either. The sudden death of a person with an ambulatory case of plague is a matter frequently noted in all epidemics of this disease, and the signs which would indicate the infection may be few and trifling; such as would be easily overlooked by one untrained. The counties about the bay should be gone over as with a fine-tooth comb and the inspection of all dead bodies before burial permits have been issued, should be compulsory. Nor should this work be confined to the bay counties alone. The contiguous country should also be placed under suspicion until we know exactly whether it is clean or not.

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